

**Political Science 8200: Dissertation**  
**Department of Political Science, TCD**  
**M.Sc. in International Politics**  
**2018-19**

Tuesday, 23 April      Thursday, 25 April  
Tuesday, 30 April      Thursday, 2 May  
Tuesday, 7 May          Thursday, 9 May  
Tuesday, 14 May        Thursday, 16 May  
10-12, Phoenix House 201

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## Description:

Students are required to submit a dissertation of 10,000 words on a research question of their choice in international politics. This is your opportunity to put into practice the knowledge and skills you have developed over the past year. The dissertation should develop and display your ability to:

1. Identify a research question worthy of sustained scholarly attention.
2. Design a research plan appropriate to answering that question within given time and resource constraints.
3. Implement all stages of that research design independently, including the structured collection of new information, the application of appropriate analytical techniques, and the interpretation of the results.
4. Present the research in written form in a manner that withstands scrutiny.

## General Advice:

We would advise you to think about the dissertation as writing a paper for an international peer-reviewed journal. The consequence of thinking about the dissertation in this way is that it directs you to selecting a well-defined and specific research question that has broad implications. The research question often identifies some important variation to be systematically described and explained. Such a formulation usually allows the researcher to identify and use relevant political science theories that offer explanations of the variation of interest.

A common format for your dissertation, and of course for journal articles, is:

- An introduction that states the research question and emphasises its social and scientific relevance.
- A theory section that discusses the relevant, sometimes competing, explanations of the phenomenon being examined. The theory section often presents specific expectations to be tested in the study.
- A research design section that justifies the selection of cases, choice of analytic method and any measurement decisions.
- An analysis section that presents the empirical findings and procedure through which these were derived.
- A conclusion that draws out the implications of the findings for the theories examined and for our broader understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

The material covered in PO8003 (Research Design) should be your main reference source of insights into how to formulate research questions and develop research plans. Although there are many, many well-written papers in political science, the following two papers might serve as good examples for research paper organization:

Ziblatt, D. (2004). "Rethinking the Origins of Federalism: Puzzle, Theory, and Evidence from 19th Century Europe." *World Politics* 57: 70-98.

Copelovitch, M. (2010). "Master or Servant? Common Agency and the Political Economy of IMF Lending." *International Studies Quarterly* 54: 49-77.

Please treat this dissertation as if it were a submission to an academic journal. That means make sure it looks professional, with proper formatting, footnote, references, etc. For a guide to formatting, please consult the American Political Science Association's *Style Manual for Political Science*, which can be found at

<https://mk0apsaconnectbvy6p6.kinstacdn.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2018/11/Style-Manual-for-Political-Science-2018.pdf>

While students are welcome to use any citation system (Chicago, APA, etc.) they desire, so long as it is used consistently and provides the relevant information, any student unsure of what citation system to use is encouraged to use the system in the *Style Manual*.

The final dissertations should use 1.5 spaces between the lines. Include a **word count** on the title page and include **page numbering** throughout. British or US English spellings are acceptable.

The best overall advice is that the more work you undertake at an earlier stage, the more you will benefit from, and enjoy, the process of writing your dissertation.

## Assessment:

The dissertation is the sole basis of the assessment. The examiners are instructed to assess the dissertation according to the standards commonly used for peer-reviewed journals. In particular, examiners assess:

- the importance of the research question and the appropriateness of its formulation;
- the appropriateness of the evidence examined and the analytical tools brought to bear;
- the extent to which the interpretations and conclusions are justified on the basis of the analytical results; and
- the contribution that the dissertation makes to knowledge on the particular question it addresses.

Each dissertation will be marked by two internal examiners, your supervisor (barring unforeseen circumstances) and another member of staff. The external examiner will decide on any differences in marks given by the internal examiners and may, as with all work, revise the marks given by the internal examiners.

## Schedule:

Please make note of the schedule below, as it contains a number of vitally important dates for you.

### *Dissertation Proposal Approval*

By **Monday 15 April**, please send a note to your course director confirming that you have agreed a dissertation proposal with your supervisor/mentor. This note should contain a one-paragraph summary proposal. This is to ensure that you make good progress early on. You are welcome to do so well in advance of 15 April; indeed, if you and your advisor are happy with the project, you can send this note right away.

### *The Dissertation Seminar*

The dissertation seminar will be held on Tuesday and Thursday during the four weeks of Trinity's undergraduate examinations period—23 April through 16 May. The dissertation seminar will run from 10 to 12 in Phoenix House 201. At each seminar, there will be four student presentations, each of which will be followed by comments from a student discussant plus general discussion from the audience. The audience will consist of the entire class plus at least two of the module instructors (Lisa Keenan, Liam Kneafsey, and Peter Stone).

Each student will be allocated approximately 30 minutes. Spend **10 minutes** outlining your dissertation project. The following 4-6 minutes will be devoted to responses by a discussant—one of your fellow students—and the remaining time for

general discussion. When you are presenting, you should practice your presentation in advance so that it takes **no more** than 11 minutes. When you are acting as a discussant, you should practice your comments in advance so that your comments take **no more** than 6 minutes. In each case, careful presentation and prioritization will help you.

You will shortly receive your assignments both as presenter and as discussant. Please note that if you wish to serve as presenter and/or discussant on another date, you may swap with another student. But **no** such swap is official until you have submitted it to your course director in writing and he has approved it.

If you are presenting, be sure to cover the following questions. (Your answers, and even your formulation of the questions, may of course vary depending on how far you are with your research.):

1. What is your research question? What is the problem you are trying to solve? This will most likely involve the “variation to be explained” —the dependent variable that the dissertation will examine. Please be as specific as possible.
2. Why is this research question significant? Why should we care? Please do not assume that the answer will be obvious.
3. What have scholars said about this problem before? This will probably mean talking about what independent variables have been linked to the dependent variable, and why.
4. What is your contribution? What are you adding to the discussion of this research problem that has not been added before? How does your approach to the dependent variable add to the existing literature?
5. Are there alternative explanations to consider? What independent variables do they involve? Will you be considering them?
6. How will you go about demonstrating that your solution to the problem is correct? What evidence or argument will you produce to support that solution? Will it involve quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, or both? And what sources of data will you be using? Again, details are very helpful.
7. What findings, if any do you have at this stage?
8. What tasks will you have to complete in order to finish the dissertation? Again, be as specific as possible.
9. Are there any specific aspects of your project on which you would particularly like feedback from the class? This is your golden opportunity!

It is very important that you post a **one-page summary** of your work in progress **at least three days** prior to the seminar. Please post this summary in the Discussion Board of the Blackboard page for the dissertation seminar. The Discussion Board can be found under “Dissertation Proposals.” Posting in a timely fashion will allow everyone in attendance—**especially your discussant**—to prepare for your presentation and offer useful feedback.

You may (but are not required to) use PowerPoint slides to structure your presentation. (Most students have done so in the past.) If so, you should provide

copies of your slides to your discussant in advance as well. Please note that it is common for students to try to present too many slides, so think carefully about how many you need.

The discussants are expected to provide constructive feedback on each of these points, where relevant. Discussants are expected to formulate specific questions and comments to inform the subsequent discussion and to help the presenter move forward with the research.

You are of course required to attend every seminar regardless of whether you are assigned a formal role as presenter or discussant. This requirement is for the benefit of other students and for yourself, since other students will be facing the same issues as you. We expect all participants to make a contribution every week.

### *Supervisor Feedback*

You should aim to have a completed draft of your dissertation to your dissertation advisor by mid-June. This will give you plenty of time in July and August to revise and improve the draft. If you are unable to achieve a complete draft by this time, don't panic—it will still be possible for you to complete the dissertation on time, but you will have much more work to do. But by mid-June, you definitely want to be at a point where you know just what you have to do to get the dissertation done by the deadline.

Please work closely with your dissertation supervisor to make sure that your project is in shape by mid-June. Your work with your supervisor should be completed by **Friday 21 June**. Your supervisor is under no obligation to provide further assistance after that date. The dissertation should be an independent piece of work. It is therefore not appropriate to expect staff to comment on a sequence of drafts prior to final submission.

### *Submitting the Dissertation*

On or before midnight on **Monday 12 August 2019**, please submit your final dissertation in the following two formats:

1. Submit one copy electronically via Turnitin. You should use the Turnitin page for the dissertation seminar Blackboard page.
2. Submit two hard copies in the department mailboxes, one to your dissertation supervisor and one to your course director (**two** to your course director if he is also your dissertation supervisor). If you are hand delivering them, make sure you give yourself enough time to make it to the department office, as it will close early on that date. If you are not in College, you may post two copies to the departmental office with instructions on who is to receive them. The envelope should be postmarked 12 August or earlier. Do not bind the hard copies in any fancy way, but each copy should be stapled together.